

SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

For Those who Reason

A human being is not,
in any proper sense,
a human being till he is educated.



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The Relevance of the Quran and Sunnah in Modern Times

Every religion revealed by God was, in its original form, eternal in character, just as the sun and the moon, the air and the water have a timeless character about them. Religion, in fact, is another name for eternal values, which in their nature are timeless and uniformly applicable in all situations and at all times.

A religion loses its relevance in succeeding ages when it is no longer preserved in its pristine form owing to human additions and interpolations. The Prophet of Islam who came in the 7th century, did not bring a new religion. His mission in fact was aimed at sifting the divinely revealed parts from the human additions which had crept into the ancient religions over the ages. The divine religion thus needed to be established in its original form. This reality has been expressed thus in the Quran:

“I will show mercy to those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, He enjoins on them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful for them the good things and forbids them the bad things, and removes from them their burden and the shackles that were upon them. So those who shall believe in him, and honour and support him, and help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him shall surely triumph.” (7:157)

In this verse “burden” and “shackles” mean human addition. It is these human additions which make a religion irrelevant in succeeding ages. When a religion is purified of human additions, the question of irrelevance with the time automatically vanishes. Since Islam is free from all these additions, there is no possibility of Islam being irrelevant at any time or in any situation. In actual fact the commands given in Islam are totally timeless in character. As the Quran says:

He has prescribed for you the religion which He enjoined on Noah, and which We have revealed to you, and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying, ‘Remain steadfast in faith, and be not divided therein. (42:13)

In this verse the believers are commanded to follow those teachings of religion which were given to all prophets. These are: monotheism, sincerity, good virtues, character, and good deeds for the Hereafter. We learn from this verse that there are four parts of religious teachings sent down by God. One part encompasses all that is common to all the prophets sent to any part of the world. These teachings do not change with the changing times. These are the basic essence of religion. If we have to follow this real part of religion, the question of relevance or irrelevance does not arise, whatever the age. For its tenets are based on eternal values.

Another part of God’s religion covers Shariah (Law) and Minhaj (Method) (see the Quran, 5:48). In this second part of the teachings some concessions had to be made according to the age and situation in

which the teachings were revealed. That is why the prophets were given different Shariah at different times.

In the above verse, Shariah means detailed law and Minhaj means its method. Since these two things relate very much to circumstances, they change with the changing situations. For instance, the principle of marriage between Adam's sons and daughters were different from the principles given to other prophets. Similarly, the respective political methods followed by Yousuf (Joseph) and Musa were different from one another. This difference was due to the difference in time and circumstances.

If we look at the teachings of Islam from this angle, we shall find that there is no conflict between these teachings and the demands of modern times and that Islam is practicable in the modern age in the full sense of the word.

The real and basic demand of Islam is that man should believe in one God. He should worship Him alone. He should embody truth, honesty, justice and other moral values. In short, within his own private sphere, he should fully obey God. Obviously, these teachings of Islam do not clash with the demands of modern times, which are equally practicable today.

Another part of Islam pertains to social laws. For instance, deterrent punishments. These kinds of laws similarly do not clash with the demands of modern times. For commandments such as these do not mean that Muslims should start implementing these commands in whatever circumstances they find themselves. On the contrary, the prerequisite for the enforcement of these commands is that first of all they should be acceptable in society. As long as they remain unacceptable they will remain in abeyance.

Then there is Minhaj, that is, method. In this field also there is no clash between Islam and modern times. For, in social matters Islam will adopt whatever method is worthy of being implemented according to the spirit of the age. For instance, no attempt will be made to impose the system of caliphate by force in a country which has a democratic system. Rather by cooperating with the times, peaceful Islamic dawah work will be performed. That is demonstrated in the lives of the various prophets. In such matters, there is no single method which emerged among the prophets or the pious caliphs. We deduce an important principle from an incident in the life of the Prophet of Islam. A person named Musaylama rose in Yaman, who falsely claimed to be God's prophet and to have been appointed as co-prophet along with the Prophet Muhammad. Musaylama sent a two-member delegation to Madinah to meet the Prophet of Islam and ask him to acknowledge his prophethood. The Prophet asked the delegates what opinion they had about Musaylama regarding his claim to prophethood. They said that they believed in his claim. At this the Prophet of Islam replied that, had there been no rule in this world that envoys should not be harmed, he would have had both of them killed. (*Seerat ibn Hisham*).

From this incident in the life of the Prophet of Islam, we learn a very important principle of shariah. That is, if a principle is generally accepted, at the international level, then the relevant Islamic principle will

also be the same as that of other nations. This decision of the Prophet of Islam shows that in matters of age-old customs the law of the believers as well as of other nations would not be separate, provided the matter in hand did not pertain to some unlawful act, for instance, the eating of pork. It is obvious that if Islam followed this principle in international matters, then there would be no conflict or clash in the practical sense between Islam and other nations in respect of changing times.

One important teaching of Islam is that, with the exception of matters of worship and beliefs, no command is absolute so far as social matters are concerned. Commands can change with changes in place and time. The Shariah law can be changed as per the rule framed by our jurists. "Commands change with the change of time and place." This teaching establishes at the outset that in no circumstance we should clash with the times. Rather, in keeping with the demand of the times we are free to carve out our path. In such a situation there is no possibility of Islam ever appearing to be irrelevant with the change of time. Obviously, when we are not supposed to go against circumstances, how could Islam ever become irrelevant due to the changed situation.

From a study of the Prophet's life we may adduce the important congregational principle that Islam does not encourage us to clash with the prevailing political status quo but urges us instead to pursue our goal by accepting the status quo. This teaching solves the problem of Islam ever becoming irrelevant with the changing times. A system becomes irrelevant only when it is at variance with the changing times. When there is no such clash, the question of irrelevance does not arise at all.

The guidance of the Prophet of Islam has been gathered together in books of traditions, one part of which is found in *Kitab al Fitan*. In these traditions Muslims have been commanded, in no uncertain terms, that in any circumstance and in any age when they find political corruption among the rulers, they must sedulously refrain from opting for a policy of confrontation with them. Totally avoiding political confrontation with them, they must continue working in non-controversial spheres, for instance, in the fields of education, dawah, economics, social work, etc. The aim of this teaching of the Prophet is to make Islam relevant at all times.

The actual target of Islam is the intellectual, spiritual and moral rectification of the individual. This task is wholly related to the sphere of individual freedom. Today the principle has been accepted all over the world that every individual should be granted full freedom in his own personal sphere. He is free to think and act as he likes. This is the actual sphere of Islamic action. And when in this sphere every individual is granted total freedom, no objection can be raised that Islam has lost its relevance in modern times.

Another sphere of human action is that which concerns social matters. This is the sphere in which confrontation takes place with others, raising the question of relevance and irrelevance. Islamic teaching for this sphere is action in accordance with circumstances. If circumstances are not conducive for an action, we have to follow the path of persuasion and counselling, strictly adhering to peaceful means.

There are also certain matters where the teachings of Islam apparently go against the prevalent custom. For instance, the justification of wine, interest-based economy, deterrent punishment, different workplaces for men and women or secular democracy in place of the Khilafat, etc. The teachings of Islam in such matters are clearly different from the prevalent custom of modern times. And as we know, the majority today is not at the moment willing to accept the teaching of Islam in these matters.

This would appear to show that Islam has become irrelevant in modern times. But it is not right to draw this conclusion in haste. It is true that the teachings of Islam in social matters are different from the custom of the age. But this is a matter which pertains to ideological difference. Islam does not enjoin its followers to set about changing the status quo at the first instance, in order to replace it with the Islamic system. The teaching of Islam in this matter is to opt for the way of patience. That is, refraining completely from launching oneself on a collision course and rather communicating one's point of view in the language of persuasion. In this way an atmosphere can be created which is favourable to Islam and the relevance of Islam can be proved purely on a rational basis, so that it may find acceptance in due course.

In modern times there are two aspects to a religion becoming irrelevant, one ideological, another practical. Becoming irrelevant from the practical point of view means that a religion gives such commands to its adherents as are impracticable from the point of view of the age factor. As mentioned above, no such command exists in Islam. In its practical aspects, Islam is a religion of adjustment, giving ample concession to circumstances. There is enough flexibility in Islam in this regard. That is why Islam could never become irrelevant, whatever the age, so far as practical matters are concerned.

When we look at this issue from the ideological point of view, we do find on certain occasions, that the demands of Islam and the demands of the age are diametrically opposed to one another. But as mentioned above, in matters of ideological differences the way of peaceful persuasion alone will be adopted. At all events, no practical initiative be taken, when the circumstances are unfavourable. In such a state of affairs, ideological difference can never create any problem in any age or in any situation.

One thing is worth remembering in this connection, and that concerns Ijtihad. One role of Ijtihad is that whenever any teaching of Islam appears to be going against the demands of the time, the religious scholars are duty-bound to strive by exercising Ijtihad to seek a reapplication of the teachings of Islam to changing situations. Ijtihad is in fact another name for seeking reapplication of Islamic teachings to the changing needs of the time.

Muslim scholars of modern times, feeling the need to exercise Ijtihad, have made an effort to reapply the principle of Islam in this matter. For instance, on the Indian subcontinent Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said that since in modern times the nationality was linked

with the homeland, Islam would also follow the same principle. That is to say, in whichever country Muslims lived, they would be regarded as co-patriots like other citizens. And they would not insist on a separate nationality for themselves.

Great importance has been attached to the process of Ijtihad in Islam. According to one tradition of *Sahih al Bukhari*, if a Muslim exercises Ijtihad and he reaches the right decision he will be doubly rewarded and if, even after his sincere effort, he fails to reach the right judgement he will still be rewarded. This shows that the act of Ijtihad must continue in all circumstances, even when there is a possibility of arriving at the wrong judgement.

The aim of Ijtihad is that in all ages the gap between Islam and the age may continue to be filled. In no circumstance should the impression be formed that Islam has become irrelevant in the changed circumstances. It was due to the importance of this matter that the Prophet of Islam encouraged Muslims to continue the process of Ijtihad, even at the risk of making mistakes. In no circumstance was the door of Ijtihad to be closed.

The truth is that the actual goal of Islam is to bring about an intellectual revolution among the people, in order to produce high thinking. Such a task is eternal in its nature. Along with eternal laws goes the principle of flexibility in Islam. Along with absolute commands Islam gives ample space for concessions and exemptions. Along with the observance of form Islam gives equal importance to the spirit.

Peace in Islam

According to my study of Islamic scriptures as well as the life of the Prophet of Islam I can say that in Islam peace is the rule and war is a rare exception. According to the Quran, one can say that peace is the greatest concern of God Almighty. The greatest concern of God is to make people aware of His creation plan regarding mankind. This can only be realized in a peaceful atmosphere.

Peace and war both are methods rather than creed. So both can be judged by their results. It is a fact that any positive goal can be achieved only in peaceful conditions while war may destroy it. The result of war is destruction, the result of peace is construction. So in Islam it is required to maintain peace at any cost.

The Quran is a book of Dawah (invitation to the way of God). Almost all the verses of the Quran are related to Dawah, directly or indirectly. So Dawah is the greatest mission of Islam. It is dawah mission or dawah work for which all the prophets were sent to this world.

And peaceful atmosphere is must for Dawah work. In an atmosphere where hate and violence and war prevail, no dawah work can be performed successfully.

There are many verses in the Quran and there are a number of Hadith which endorse this fact very clearly. Here I would like to mention some of those references.

1. The Prophet of Islam started his mission in 610 AD in Makkah. At that time in Makkah, there were all kinds of problems: there was poverty, political corruption, idol worship etc.

But one of the first verse of the Quran which was revealed there was no reference to any of these problems. It directly said: "O Prophet, arise and warn people." In other words, do Dawah work and convey the message of God to all mankind. In this Quranic verse you can see that the Prophet was commanded by God to keep away from economic, social, political and religious problems and instead concentrate completely on Dawah work, that is conveying the Divine Message to all mankind.

2. After 13 years of prophetic mission, Makkah became a totally hostile place for the Prophet. Few people embraced Islam to become companions of the Prophet and majority of the Makkan people including their leaders remained hostile. Moreover they plotted to kill the Prophet of Islam.

Makkan people opted for violent confrontation. They gathered in front of the Prophet's home holding swords but the Prophet avoided confrontations and managed to migrate from Makkah to Madinah. The sole reason behind this migration was that in contrast to Makkah the conditions at Madinah were

favourable for Dawah work, as was proved by later history.

When the Prophet reached Madinah, he never uttered a word of complain or protest against Makkan people. He addressed people of Medina assembled to hear him speak. His address was made in a very positive tone. There was no mention at all of atrocities committed by Makkan people. His address was purely a dawah address. He said, "O people of Madinah, save yourselves from the Fire of Hell, even by giving a piece of date."

The people of Makkah were not satisfied with the migration of the Prophet and would not let him be. They were enraged and continued to wage wars against the Prophet of Islam in order to kill him or oust him from Madinah.

But once again the Prophet of Islam adopted the course of peaceful action. He managed to sign an agreement of peace, generally known as Hudaibiyah Agreement. In fact it was a no-war pact for ten years. Finalizing this peace agreement the Prophet accepted unilaterally almost all the conditions demanded by the opposite party. The purpose of this unilateral adjustment was to normalize the situation and open the door for peaceful dawah work.

What is peace? Peace means normal situation, a situation where peaceful interaction and open dialogue is possible. Peace creates favourable conditions for dawah work whereas war disturbs all dawah activity. War produces hate among people and where there is hate and anger, no dawah work can be carried on successfully. In fact hate, violence and war are killers of dawah process, and peace establishes normalcy, and it is only where normalcy prevails that dawah work can be performed successfully. In chapter 22 of the Quran, there is a very relevant verse. The translation of this verse runs like this: "Let them not then dispute with you on the matter, But you do invite (them) to your Lord: for you are assuredly on the right way." (22:67)

This Quranic verse gives us the general policy of Muslims in respect of their mission. According to this, Muslims should avoid all kinds of confrontations unilaterally. So that the process of Dawah may continue uninterrupted. Any kind of rivalry and confrontation between Muslims and non-Muslims, will disturb the whole process of Dawah. So Muslims as a dai (inviter) must take the responsibility of not disturbing the normal relationship between dai and madu (invitee). It is a commandment of God and no excuse, whatsoever, would be accepted by God in this regard.

History of Islam shows that every success achieved by Muslims was the result of Dawah work either directly or indirectly. Dawah is the only way of receiving blessings from God. No Dawah, no help from God the Almighty. It is right to say that with Dawah work we stand, without Dawah work we fall.

Cultivating Islamic Idealism

The foundation of a society is based on mutual well wishing. This is taught in the Quran. In chapter *Al-Asr* (The Time) the Qur'an says: By the time, verily Man is in loss, except for those who believe and do good works and exhort one another to truth and to patience (103:1-3)

The question is how a man should live in a society. The Prophet Muhammad said, "If any one of you sees an evil in society, he must rectify it by his own hand. And if he has no capacity to do so, he should do it by his tongue. And if he is unable even to discourage it, then, let him condemn the same in his own heart." A society based on these principles will naturally be a place in which good will flourish as a result of mutual reminding, and the roots of evil, if not totally eradicated, will dry up due to public discouragement. When the truth is openly propagated and the virtue of patience highly recommended in the society, there will definitely prevail a peaceful atmosphere which is a prerequisite for the healthy growth and development of both the individual personality and the social system at large. It is only in an atmosphere of such peaceful social order that the rights of individuals and communal harmony are ensured, and the higher values of brotherhood, cooperation and altruism are sincerely observed; and, finally, the projects of common welfare, progress and prosperity are successfully achieved. When such ideals are consciously put into practice, there will emerge a society that will be appreciably more secure, free of violence and naturally cooperative, progressive, prosperous, good enhancing and evil-resisting.

At individual level a man should lead a highly disciplined life, always adhering to the set of do's and don'ts ordained by God Almighty. He is entirely pure in speech, and even subordinates his intention and thinking to the will of God. He always feels himself to be a servant of his Lord. The Qur'an depicts the true man thus:

And the servants of the Beneficent God are they who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say: "Peace." And they who pass the night standing and prostrating themselves before their Lord. And they who say: O our Lord! ward off from us the punishment of hell, for surely its punishment is everlasting. Surely it is an evil abode and (evil) place to stay. And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, but keep the golden mean. And they who do not call upon any other god besides Allah and do not kill, which Allah has forbidden, except in the requirements of justice, and (who) do not commit fornication and he who does this shall meet with evil; his punishment shall be doubled on the Day of Resurrection, and he shall abide in abasement forever; unless he repents and believes and does good deeds; for them Allah will change his evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And whoever repents and does good shall surely return to Allah. And they who do not bear witness to what is false, and when they hear what is profane they maintain their dignity. And they who, when reminded of the signs of their Lord, do not fall down thereat deaf and blind. And they who say: 'O our Lord! grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes, and make us examples to those who fear you.' These shall be rewarded with lofty places in paradise because they were patient, and shall be met therein with greetings and salutations. There they shall abide forever: a blessed dwelling and

blessed resting place. Say (to the unbelievers): Little cares my Lord for you if you do not invoke Him. But Now that you have indeed rejected (the truth), His punishment is bound to overtake you.

When a man succeeds in discovering this ideal, he becomes a person who is fit to be called a complete man, one who has succeeded in making his life purposeful, in the real sense of the word. Such a person has been called in the Qur'an: *Al-Nafs al-Mutmainna* (89:27). This means a soul at rest, in peace or in a state of complete satisfaction. That is, a man who wholeheartedly follows the divine way of life and is always fully satisfied, whether or not it is in consonance with his own desires. By showing such total willingness to surrender his will to the will of God, he attains that state of humanity which is at one with the creation plan of God. Such people will be rewarded with eternal paradise in the world Hereafter.

This will to search for the truth is implanted in everyone. But it depends upon every individual himself, whether or not he pursues this natural urge. Only through sincere pursuit will he discover the truth and thus make his life meaningful. For any kind of negligence or apathy in this regard, there is no excuse, whatever the circumstances.

Search for Truth

Man is a born seeker — a veritable truth-seeking being. Every human being regards himself as incomplete until he has found that supreme principle by which he can explain his existence in this world and discover the purpose and meaning of his life.

Everyone is a seeker. True. But few are finders. Why? Because, where seeking is instinctive, finding is the outcome of one's own conscious effort.

In the pre-Islamic period, there were certain individuals in Arabia, called *Hunafa*. They were all truth seekers. Confining themselves to solitary places, they would remember God and say: "O God if we had known how to worship You, we would have worshipped you accordingly."

This was due to their urge to come to grips with reality — an urge such as is found in every human being, the difference between one individual and another being only one of degree: in some, the urge is weak, in others it is strong.

Then, there are some deviations. Some people take certain material objects to be their goal in life and do their utmost to obtain them. But there is an internal evidence that they do so mistakenly. Before obtaining these material objects, they are highly enthusiastic about them. But as soon as they have them in their possession their enthusiasm turns to frustration for, with experience, they invariably find that what they have struggled for so hard, has failed to give them the desired sense of fulfillment. All these material things in this world are meant to fulfill only our physical needs. They have nothing to do with the purpose of our lives. This purpose can be only spiritual in nature, and not something material.

To achieve this purpose is the greatest quest in life. Everyone is motivated, consciously or unconsciously, by this demand of human nature, everyone at one time or another suffers from a sense of frustration, with or without sad experiences. To make one's life meaningful, therefore one has to discover its purpose. One should be extremely sincere and honest in this respect. Sincerity and honesty are an assurance of engaging oneself unremittingly in this pursuit, and never giving-up, until one has discovered the real purpose of human existence.

When a man succeeds in discovering this ideal, he becomes a person who is fit to be called a complete man, one who has succeeded in making his life purposeful, in the real sense of the word. Such a person has been called in the Qur'an: *Al-Nafs al-Mutmainna* (89:27). This means a soul at rest, in peace or in a state of complete satisfaction. That is, a man who wholeheartedly follows the divine way of life and is always fully satisfied, whether or not it is in consonance with his own desires. By showing such total willingness to surrender his will to the will of God, he attains that state of humanity which is at one with the creation plan of God. This will to search for the truth is implanted in everyone. But it depends upon every individual himself, whether or not he pursues this natural urge. Only through sincere pursuit will he discover the truth and thus make his life meaningful. For any kind of negligence or apathy in this regard, there is no excuse, whatever the circumstances.

Philosophy

Philosophy is the only discipline which, by its own definition, embodies the quest for knowledge and understanding of the nature and meaning of the universe as well as of human life. But after a long search of more than 5000 years, to which the greatest minds of human history have been bent, it has failed to provide any definite answer to such questions.

The main concern of philosophy was to make a unified picture of the world, including human life. But the long history of philosophy shows that this still remains an unfulfilled dream. The Encyclopaedia Britannica in its 27-page article on philosophy and its history, admits that there seems to be no possibility of philosophical unification. The article concludes with this remark:

In the contemporary philosophical universe, multiplicity and division still reign. (*EB*, Vol. 14:274 [1984])

Why this failure? This failure is not of a chance or intermittent nature, but seems to be a permanent feature of the philosophical approach to reality. The Qur'an has drawn our attention to this fact, saying:

They put questions to you about the Spirit. Say: "The Spirit is at the command of my Lord and of knowledge you have been given only a little." (17:85)

This means that the problem stems from man's own shortcomings. The philosophical explanation of the world requires unbounded knowledge, whereas man has had only limited knowledge bestowed upon him. Due to these intellectual constraints man cannot uncover the secrets of the world on his own. So it is not the lack of research, but the blinkered state of the human mind, that stands as a permanent obstacle in the philosopher's path to reality. It is this human inadequacy which explains the unexplainable.

For example, suppose, in order to unveil reality and the law of life, the enquirer starts from a study of human settlements. After a detailed survey, he comes to the conclusion that since society is composed of human beings, he had better focus on the individual, and so he studies human psychology. But there he finds that, despite extensive research in this field it has resulted in nothing but intellectual chaos.

He ultimately finds that no unified system emerges from psychology. In despair of finding any solution to the problem, he turns to biology. His in-depth study of biology leads him to the conclusion that the whole human system is based on certain chemical actions and reactions, so, for a proper understanding of the human body he begins to study physics and chemistry. This study leads him to the discovery that, in

the last analysis, man like other things, is composed of atoms. So, he takes to the study of nuclear science, only to arrive at the conclusion that the atom is composed of nothing but incomprehensible waves of electrons.

At this point man, as well as the universe, are seen as nothing but, in the words of a scientist, a mad dance of electrons. A philosopher ostensibly begins his study from a basis of knowledge, but ultimately comes to a point where there is nothing but the universal darkness of bewilderment. Thus a 5000-year journey of philosophy has brought the sorry conclusion that, due to its limitations, it is simply not in a position to unfold the secrets of the universe.

It is evident from the several thousand year-long history of philosophical inquiry, that philosophy has failed to give any satisfactory answer to questions concerning reality. Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence that philosophy is inherently incompetent for the task undertaken by it. The need, therefore, is to find some alternative discipline that may help us reach our desired intellectual goal.

Science

Science has divided the world of knowledge into two parts—knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. According to this division, science has confined its study only to a part of the world and not to the entire world. A scientist has rightly remarked that “science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality.”

This means that science being confined in its scope to the physical aspect of the world, has kept itself aloof from higher spiritual matters. No scientist has ever claimed that science attempts to find out the absolute truth. All scientists humbly submit that the “search for truth” is not their target. They are simply trying to understand how the objective world functions and not why it functions. For instance, the chemistry of a flower may be chemically analyzed, but not its odour.

Science has never claimed that its objective is to discover the total truth or absolute reality. The concerns of science are basically descriptive, and not teleological. Although science has failed to give a satisfactory answer to the quest for truth, it is not to be disparaged, for this has never been its motivation.

Many people had pinned their hopes on science providing them with the superior life they had sought for so long. But after more than two hundred years, it has dawned upon recent generations that science has fallen very far short of fulfilling man's hopes and aspirations, even in the material sense. Now it has been generally acknowledged that, although science has many plus points for human betterment, it has many minus points as well.

Science gave us machines, but along with them it also gave us a new kind of social problem: unemployment. Science gave us comfortable motor cars but at the same time it polluted the air, making it difficult for human beings to inhale fresh air, just as with the rise of modern industry, there came the pollution of life giving water. Production may have been speeded up, but at the cost of adversely affecting our whole social structure.

If the object of science was to provide man with the answer to his search for truth it had obviously failed. If the search for truth was not within the province of science, there was no reason for it to figure in such discussions at all. In other words, science cannot be legitimately blamed for not helping man to grasp the ultimate reality, for this was not something expected of it. Indeed the reality lies far beyond the boundaries of science.

Mysticism

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, mysticism is a "quest for a hidden truth or wisdom." The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, defines it thus: "Mysticism is the direct experience of the divine as real and near, blotting out all sense of time and producing intense joy."

Some people mistakenly think that mysticism is the answer to the search for truth. In fact, mysticism, to be more exact, is a sort of escapism. It seeks a refuge rather than the truth.

According to the mystics, the final state produced by mystical exercises is inner joy or spiritual bliss.

1. The search for truth, by its very nature, is entirely an intellectual exercise. Its findings too are intellectual in nature. It is successful when the seeker finds rational answers to the questions he poses about the universe and his own existence. The search for truth is not a vague matter. It begins from the conscious mind and also culminates there.

The case of mysticism is quite different. Mysticism, essentially based on intuition, is not really a conscious intellectual process. As such, the mystical experience is more an act of spiritual intoxication than an effort to apprehend the truth in intellectual terms. A drug user undergoes an experience of inner pleasure which is too vaguely and unconsciously felt to be explained in comprehensible language. Similarly, what a mystic experiences is a type of unconscious ecstasy, which does not amount to a consciously sought after or properly assessable discovery. On the contrary, the search for truth is an intellectual exercise from beginning to end.

2. Mysticism, as popularly conceived, makes the basic assumption that the physical, material, and social needs of man act as obstacles to his spiritual progress. Therefore, mysticism teaches him to reduce his physical needs to the barest minimum; to renounce worldly and social relations; and if possible to retire to the mountains or jungles. In this way, he will supposedly be able to purify his soul. Thus, by giving up the world and by certain exercises in self-abnegation, a mystic expects to awaken his spirituality.

The educated community, however, does not find this concept of mysticism acceptable. A seeker aims at a rational explanation of the world and endeavours to discover a definite principle by which he may successfully plan his present life. Mysticism, on the contrary, teaches man to abandon the world itself; to depart from the world without uncovering its mystery. Obviously such a scheme amounts only to an aggravation of the problem rather than a solution to it.

3. The mystics can broadly be divided into two groups. Those who believe in God and those who do not. Non-believers in God assert that there is a hidden treasure in the centres of our souls. The task of the mystic is to discover this hidden treasure. But this is only a supposition. None of them has ever been able to define this hidden treasure or to explain it in understandable terms. Tagore has thus

expressed this claim made by the mystics:

“Man has a feeling that he is truly represented in something which exceeds himself.”

But this is only a subjective statement unsupported by logical proofs. That is why, in spite of its great popularity, no school of this mystical thought has so far produced any objective criterion by which one may rationally ascertain that the existence of such a hidden treasure within the human soul is a reality, and not an illusion. On the other hand, no well-defined law, or step-by-step practical programme, has been introduced by any individual or group that might help the common man reach his spiritual destination consciously and independently.

Moreover, mysticism makes the claim that the natural quest of man is its own fulfillment. It does not require any external effort to arrive at the perceived goal. In other words, it is like assuming that the feeling of thirst or hunger in man contains its own satisfaction. A thirsty or hungry person is not to trouble himself to search for water or food in the outer world.

4. Those (of this school of thought) who believe in God interpret this hidden treasure in terms of God. To them the inner contemplation of a mystic is directed towards God.

This concept too is rationally inexplicable, for, if such mystic exercises are a means to discover God, then, there should be genuine proof that God Himself has shown this way to find Him. But there is no evidence that this path has been prescribed by God. On the other hand, there is a clear indication that this course separates the seeker from God's creation and leads him to a life of isolation. This makes it plain that God cannot enjoin such a path to realization as would mean nullifying the very purpose of creation.

5. The mystics hold that although the mystical experience may be a great discovery for them, it is, however, a mysterious, and unexplainable realization which can be felt at the sensory level, but which cannot be fully articulated. According to a mystic: “It is knowledge of the most adequate kind, only it cannot be expressed in words.” (EB/12:786)

This aspect of the mystical experience proves it to be a totally subjective discipline. And something as subjective as this can, in no degree, be a scientific answer to the human search for truth. Those who have attempted to describe the mystic experience have chosen different ways of doing so. One is the narrative method, that is, describing their point of view in terms only of claims, without any supporting arguments. Another method is to make use of metaphors. That is, attempt to describe something by means of supposed analogies. From the point of view of scientific reasoning, both the methods are inadequate, being quite lacking in any credibility in rational terms, and are therefore invalid.

Life and Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad

Its Relevance In A Global Context

Chapter Two

The Life of the Prophet Muhammad

THE Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, was born in Makkah in 570 A.D. in the tribe of Quraysh and died at the age of 63 in 632 A.D. in Madinah. The year of his birth is known among the Arabs as the year of the Elephant (*Aam al-Fil*) referring to the campaign of Abrahah, an Abyssinian ruler, who had come to Makkah to destroy Kabah. Makkah was then inhabited mainly by the tribe of Quraysh. In those times, this tribe enjoyed great prestige all over Arabia and the neighbouring countries, for Makkah was a flourishing trade and religious centre.

Muhammad was still in his mother's womb when his father, Abdullah, died. After his birth, Aminah, his mother, sent the baby to Abdul Muttalib, his grandfather, who was in Kabah at that time. The grandfather was overjoyed at the news, for he loved Abdullah, Muhammad's father, very much. The grandfather gave him the name "Muhammad", meaning "the praised one." As was the practice of the Makkan nobility, he was handed over to a wet nurse, Halimah al-Sadiyya, who belonged to the Banu Sad tribe. This custom is still practiced among Makkan aristocracy.

Halimah nursed Muhammad for two years and a few months. She said that when he stayed with them, her family received all kinds of unaccustomed blessings. Having nursed so many children before, she noticed something 'different' or 'extraordinary' about the infant Muhammad. These observations are recorded in detail by some biographers such as Al-Waqidi, Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham.

Two years later, after the child had been weaned, Halimah brought him back to his mother. But Makkah at that time was stricken with an epidemic, so Aminah asked her to take him back to live in the pure air of the desert.

Thus Muhammad remained in the charge of Halimah until the age of five. He learned Arabic in its purest form from this tribe. Muhammad used to tell his companions, "I am the most Arab among you, for I am of the tribe of Quraysh and I have been brought up among the tribe of Banu Sad bin Bakr.

Muhammad returned to his mother after five years of desert life. Then Aminah took him to Madinah to meet her uncles, the Banu al-Najjar. She was accompanied by Umm Ayman, her servant, on that trip. After a stay of a month in Yathrib, Aminah was on her way back to Makkah, when passing through a village called Abwah, she fell ill and died there. She was buried in Abwah. It fell to Umm Ayman to bring Muhammad back to Makkah.

Therefore, the orphan Muhammad was taken care of by his grandfather Abdul Muttalib, chief of the clan of Banu Hashim. He looked after him with great affection. As leader of the Quraysh, he used to sit on a cushion in Kabah, whenever Muhammad joined him, he was allowed to sit on that cushion. If anyone tried to stop him, his grandfather would say, "Leave him alone. By God, he is very important." (Ibn Hisham) Abdul Muttalib died when Muhammad was eight years old.

Now the guardianship of Muhammad passed to Abu Talib, his uncle, who was a merchant. Once when Abu Talib was preparing to go to Syria on a trading journey, Muhammad expressed a keen desire to accompany him. Though he was very young to undertake such a difficult journey, Abu Talib was so full of affection for him that he could not refuse, and agreed to take him on the journey.

Their trade caravan halted in the city of Busra in Syria. There was a Christian monk by the name of Bahirah living there in a monastery. He had read in the ancient books about the emergence of an Arab prophet. He recognised in Muhammad the signs of prophethood. He knew at once that he was the boy who had been destined to become the last of the prophets.

The monk invited the whole caravan to his monastery and asked Abu Talib, "In what way are you related to this child?" He said, "He is my son." Bahirah said, "It cannot be. His father should not be alive." Then Abu Talib informed him that his father was no longer alive. Bahirah advised him to return with his nephew immediately and to protect him from enemies. He said, "By God, if he is recognised, he will surely be harmed."

Ibn Ishaq writes, "Muhammad entered his adulthood as if God Himself was protecting him from the widespread evils of the period of ignorance." By this time he was well-known in Makkah for his good morals, gentle disposition and sincerity. In fact, he was called Al-Amin (trustworthy) and As-Sadiq (truthful) by his compatriots.

When Muhammad was twenty-five, a rich 40-year old widow, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid of the Quraysh tribe, entrusted him with the management of her business. She used to employ men to engage in trading on her behalf, and rewarded them with a share of the profits. Muhammad was so honest in all his dealings that she was deeply impressed by his virtues and expressed her desire to marry him. After consultations with his uncle, Muhammad accepted the proposal of marriage. Khadijah became his first wife and during her lifetime he had no other wife. With the exception of Ibrahim, who died in infancy, all his children were born to Khadijah. All his sons died in infancy. Of the daughters, Ruqaiyyah, Zaynab, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah lived long enough to accept Islam and migrate to Madinah with the Prophet.

When Muhammad was twenty-five, the Quraysh decided to rebuild the Kabah after a sudden flood had shaken its foundations and cracked its walls. The old structure was demolished and the new construction began. When the walls rose from the ground and the time came to place the famous Black Stone (Hajr al-Aswad) in its place on the east wall, a dispute arose among the clans as to who would have the honour of laying it in place. Each clan wanted to have the honour of placing the stone for itself. This dispute almost led to a civil war. No peaceful solution seemed possible.

At this critical juncture Abu Umayyah, son of Mughirah al-Makhzumi said to the Makkans,

"Put it off till tomorrow, the man who enters the Kabah first of all in the morning will be our arbitrator in this dispute." Everybody liked the idea. Men from different tribes ran to the Kabah before dawn next morning. Each one tried to be the first to enter the House of God. But the first one to pass through the gate was Muhammad. On seeing him they all said, "There goes al-Amin. We shall agree with his verdict." Then he was asked to give his decision on the matter. He took a sheet of cloth and spread it on the ground, and placed the Black Stone in the middle of it and then he asked the chiefs of all tribes to hold different ends of the sheet and lift it up. They carried the stone to the site of construction. Then Muhammad picked up the stone from the sheet and set it in place. Thus a bloody clash was averted and the dispute resolved to everybody's satisfaction.

The life of Muhammad PBUH before prophethood has been recorded in detail in several books. However, the following events are worth mentioning. A covenant known as the Alliance of Fudul (Hilf al-Fudul) had been entered into by three men, Fadal bin Fadal, Fadal bin Vida and Fadal bin Harith. This was to ensure that no oppressor ever lived in Makkah. (Sirat ibn Hisham)

This Alliance ceased to exist after the death of its architects. Muhammad was 15 years of age when a civil war broke out involving the tribes of Quraysh and Qais. It is known as the Fijar War. In view of the widespread disturbances some people thought of reviving the Alliance of Fudul, to restore tribal harmony and ensure peaceful co-existence.

It happened that a trader from Yemen sold some of his goods to Aas bin Wail, but he was not paid in full. He composed couplets narrating his misfortune and pleading for justice. This touched the pride of the Makkans, who gathered at the house of Abdullah bin Jud'an at the instance of Zubayr ibn Abd al Muttalib.

After consultations, it was decreed that the Alliance of Fudul should be renewed. Everyone agreed to support the cause of the oppressed, whether or not they belonged to Makkah. They also resolved to force the oppressor to give the oppressed their rightful dues.

Twenty years before prophethood, Muhammad PBUH participated in the Alliance. Twenty years after the prophethood he said, "I was present at the house of Abdullah bin Jud'an at the time of the Alliance. I will not go back on it, even if I were to be given hundred red camels. Even after Islam has been established, I shall still be in favour of such treaty."

During that period, there were other social treaties as well. Banu Abd al-Dar and his colleagues once gathered in the precincts of Kabah and vowed that they would not leave each other in time of need and they would not hand over anyone to other groups. Muhammad PBUH did not rescind these treaties. However, he supported them. He even said that such treaties of mutual understanding and reconciliation have been further strengthened after the advent of Islam.

Before the prophethood, Muhammad PBUH was engaged in trading. Abdullah bin Abi al-Hamsa said:

"I had transacted some business with Muhammad PBUH in those days and owed him money. I asked him to wait till I brought the required sum. When I reached home, I completely forgot about it. I remembered three days later and rushed to the spot where I had left Muhammad PBUH. He was there

waiting for me.” He did not upbraid me. All he said was ‘You caused me a great deal of inconvenience. I have been waiting for you here for the last three days.’ (Ibn Ishaq)

Abdullah bin Saib said that during the days of Ignorance, he was a partner in trade with Muhammad PBUH. Much later he went to Madinah and met him. Muhammad PBUH said, “Do you recognise me?” He said, “Indeed, you were my partner in trade. And what a wonderful partner you were! You never indulged in deceit or quarrels.”

Even before his prophethood, Muhammad used to shun polytheism, idolatry and rude behaviour. During his second journey to Syria, a dispute arose between Muhammad and a man in the course of a transaction. The man said:

“I will accept your words if you swear in the names of Lat and Uzza. (The two of three main idols worshipped in Makkah, mentioned in the Quran 53:19-20).

Muhammad replied:

“I have never sworn in the name of Lat or Uzza till today. Whenever I come by chance upon Lat or Uzza, I avoid them and carry on.”

With reference to such incidents, Ibn Hisham has rightly concluded that:

“The Messenger of God entered his adulthood as if God was protecting and watching over him. And He kept him safe from the evils of the time because, He wanted to confer on him honour and prophethood. Thus he reached a position of supremacy over all the men of his tribe. Of all of them, he was the best behaved. He was the noblest among them by his lineage and was the best neighbour. He was unparalleled in forbearance. He was honest in what he said, and the most trustworthy. He refrained from misconduct. Ultimately, he began to be called Al-Amin (the trustworthy) in Makkah.” (Sirat Ibn Hisham)

With his marriage with the wealthy Khadijah, Muhammad had access to all her wealth and property, he could expand his business as much as he desired. He had every opportunity to lead a successful and comfortable life. But with the passing of years he became less and less interested in business and devoted more and more of his time to the search of truth by means of reflection and meditation, instead of trying to establish himself in his society he took to the desert. He would often go to mount Hira, three miles from Makkah. He stayed there in the cave lost in thoughts for hours. When his supply of food and water were exhausted, he returned home for provisions and went back to the solitude of nature for prayer and meditations. He sought answers to the mysteries of life. What is man’s true role in life? What does the Lord require of us, as His servants? From where man comes and where will he go after death? It was to find answers to these perplexing questions that he betook himself to the stillness of the desert. With all these questions in mind, worldly gain and loss, comfort and distress did not concern him. He urgently wanted the answer to these important questions of truth. For nothing less than the truth could satisfy his soul. This phase of Muhammad’s life is referred to in the Quran in this verse.

“Did He not find you wandering and guide you?” (93:7).

He spent the whole of the month of Ramadan in the Cave of Hira. Finally after spending six long months in the cave, God turned in mercy to His Prophet, to guide him to the path of truth. At the age of 40, on February 12, 610 A.D., the Prophet was sitting all alone in his Cave. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in human form, bringing the first message from God. These words form part of the beginning of the ninety sixth chapter of the Quran. The Prophet's quest had finally been rewarded. God granted him guidance and chose him as His Prophet.

The angel said to him “Read.”

The Prophet replied, “I do not know how to read.”

Then Muhammad felt that his body was being squeezed hard. Then the angel released him and repeated the same command. Again Muhammad replied that he did not know how to recite. Then the angel again squeezed him and then released him for the third time and said: Read!”

Then a change came over him and he was able to repeat the divine words. Then Gabriel revealed to him the chapter Al-Alaq.

“Recite in the name of your Lord, who created; who created man from a clot of blood; Recite, and your Lord is the most Gracious. It is He who has taught man by the pen that which he did not know.” (96:1-5)

Muhammad recited these verses repeating them after the angel. Then he found that these words were written on his heart (Ibn Ishaq).

The Prophet trembled in fear of what he had seen and heard in the cave. The revelation was totally a new experience for him. He set off for his house immediately after the disappearance of the angel.

On reaching home the Prophet asked Khadijah to wrap him in blankets. He was shivering from high fever. When he calmed down, he related the whole incident to her.

Khadijah, being very kind and understanding tried her best to assure him.

She said:

“By Him who dominates Khadijah's soul, I pray and I hope that you will be the Prophet of this nation. By God, He will not let you down. You are kind to your relations. You speak the truth, you help the poor and bear their burden, you honour guests and help those in distress. Surely God will never let you fail.”

Khadijah then suggested that they should go and consult her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who had become a Christian hermit.

Waraqa heard the whole account from Muhammad and said:

"I am sure the angel that descended on Moses has descended on you. You will be abused, and you will be pursued. I wish I could be alive to give you my support when your people will turn you out."

"Will they turn me out?" The Prophet found this difficult to believe. Waraqa replied that people have always turned against those who are recipients of God's messages.

The Prophet's wife Khadijah was the first convert to Islam. When the news of Muhammad's prophethood reached a freed slave, Zayd who was 30 years of age, and his cousin Ali, who was about eleven, both declared their faith in Islam. Abu Bakr, the Prophet's friend from childhood, was out of town. On his return he heard of the new experience of the Prophet. People said to him that his friend had taken leave of his senses, believing that angels brought him messages from God. But Abu Bakr trusted the Prophet completely. Not for one moment did he doubt his veracity. He immediately went to meet the Prophet to find out the truth for himself. Abu Bakr asked the Prophet whether an angel had really descended upon him from God and had given him a message. The Prophet said "Yes," and without a moment's hesitation Abu Bakr professed his faith. He did not require any arguments to be convinced that he was telling the truth.

This small group of the Faithful were the first believers of Islam. In the first stage, the Prophet was asked to spread the message of Islam quietly to avoid arousing any hostility. Abu Bakr, being an influential merchant, was able to bring some of his friends, also rich merchants, into the fold of Islam. But the majority of the conversions took place among the weak and the poor.

In the second stage the Prophet received the command from God to spread the message publicly, but first to his own kin.

According to Arab custom, people used to ascend a hill when they had to announce some important news. So the Prophet, with his all-important tidings, climbed up on a hillock called Safa, situated near the Kabah. He then called out to the people, who all gathered around him. Then he addressed them thus: "If I tell you that a big army is hiding behind that mountain and is ready to attack you, will you believe me?" They all chorused, "Of course, we will, for we trust you. We know you always tell the truth." Then the Prophet said:

"God has commanded me to warn you, my kinsmen, that you should worship none but the one and only God. If you fail to do so, you will invite God's wrath. And I will not be able to do anything to help you, even though you are my kinsmen."

Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle, became very angry and said:

"Woe to you on this day! Did you assemble us for this?"

Some remarked that he had gone mad. Soon they all dispersed without caring to give any thought to the words of the Prophet.

There was one main reason for the Quraysh to oppose the Prophet, and to keep him from spreading his message. Makkah was a centre of pilgrimage because of the Kabah, which housed 360

idols of the neighbouring tribes and nations. Since Islam believed in only one God, the Quraysh feared that once the concept of one God became popular, the tribes would stop visiting the Kabah to pay homage to the idols. This would deprive them of the respect they commanded as guardians of the Kabah. Besides, the prosperity of Makkah depended mainly on these idols. People in great numbers from the neighbouring tribes used to visit Makkah all the year round to make offerings to the idols. This brought prosperity to Makkah, for trade flourished side by side with the pilgrimage. Makkah being a desert, no agriculture or economic resources existed there. The Kabah was their only asset. But, all the Makkans were not hostile. There were people who gave serious thought to the message of the Quran and gradually began to accept Islam. About 200 people from Makkah as well as the neighbouring settlements entered the fold of Islam.

The Quraysh who enjoyed the Makkan leadership considered the teachings of the new religion an insult to the religion of their forefathers. In Islam they saw a danger to their own leadership. Such leaders as Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab were the most hostile to the Prophet. They began to give serious thought to the matter. Islam was fast gaining ground, so they thought that they could not afford to postpone taking action. This menace, they had to nip in the bud.

The chiefs of different clans gathered to discuss this matter. They all felt that if Abu Talib did not come in their way, they would have no difficulty in finding a solution to this problem. So they all came to Abu Talib to tell him to stop Muhammad from spreading his message.

They warned him, "Tell Muhammad to stop spreading his message, or you will abandon him. If you fail to do so, you should be ready to suffer for the deeds of your nephew."

Abu Talib, an old man, felt that he would not be able to resist their wrath. So he told Muhammad what the Quraysh chiefs had said to him and then added, "My dearest nephew, look to your own safety, and to the safety of your uncle, and do not cause me to carry a burden I cannot bear."

For a while the Prophet stood motionless. On the one hand, there was his old uncle weakened by the people's opposition, and on the other hand, there was the responsibility to proclaim the truth till his last breath. And the only source of strength was his faith and his conviction in the truth. So he decided to discharge his duty whatever the cost. In a firm and calm voice, and with tears in his eyes, he said:

"O uncle! By God Almighty, I swear that even if they were to place the sun on my right and the moon on my left, I would not give up my mission. I must go on carrying it out until I die."

Abu Talib, touched by the sincerity and force of the words uttered by his nephew, remained motionless for a while. Then he turned to the Prophet and said:

"My nephew, go your way. Do your duty. Let my people turn against me. I am with you. No one shall harm you as long as I live."

THE SECOND SURAH
ALBAQARH (THE COW)
verse 196 to verse 212

- (196) AND PERFORM the pilgrimage and the pious visit [to Mecca]¹⁷⁴ in honour of God; and if you are held back, give instead whatever offering you can easily afford. And do not shave your heads until the offering has been sacrificed:¹⁷⁵ but he from among you who is ill or suffers from an ailment of the head shall redeem himself by fasting, or alms, or [any other] act of worship. And if you are hale and secure¹⁷⁶ then he who takes advantage of a pious visit before the [time of] pilgrimage shall give whatever offering he can, easily afford:¹⁷⁷ whereas he who cannot afford it shall fast for three days during the pilgrimage and for seven days after your return: that is, ten full [days]. All this relates to him who does not live near the Inviolable House of Worship.¹⁷⁷ And remain conscious of God, and know that God is severe in retribution.¹⁷⁹
- (197) The pilgrimage shall take place in the months appointed for it.¹⁸⁰ And whoever undertakes the pilgrimage in those [months] shall, while on pilgrimage, abstain from lewd speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarrelling; and whatever good you may do. God is aware of it. And make provision for yourselves -but, verily, the best of all provision is God-consciousness: remain then, conscious of Me, O you who are endowed with insight!
- (198) [However,] you will be committing no sin if [during the pilgrimage] you seek to obtain any bounty from your Sustainer.¹⁸¹ And when you surge downward in multitudes from 'Arafat,¹⁸² remember God at the holy place, and remember Him as the One who guided you after you had indeed been lost on your way;¹⁸³
- (199) And surge onward together with the multitude of all the other people who surge onward,¹⁸⁴ and ask God to forgive you your sins: for, verily, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.
- (200) And when you have performed your acts of worship, [continue to] bear God in mind as you would bear your own fathers in mind -nay, with a yet keener remembrance:¹⁸⁵ For there are people who [merely] pray, "O our Sustainer! Give us in this world" -and such shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come. (201) But there are among them such as pray, "O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come, and keep us safe from suffering through the fire":

- (202) It is these that shall have their portion [of happiness] in return for what they have earned. And God is swift in reckoning.
- (203) And bear God in mind during the appointed days;¹⁸⁶ but he who hurries away within two days shall incur no sin, and he who tarries longer shall incur no sin, provided that he is conscious of God. Hence, remain conscious of God, and know that unto Him you shall be gathered.
- (204) NOW THERE IS a kind of man¹⁸⁷ whose views on the life of this world may please thee greatly, and [the more so as] he cites God as witness to what is in his heart and is, moreover, exceedingly skillful in argument.¹⁸⁸
- (205) But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man's] tilth and progeny:¹⁸⁹ and God does not love corruption.
- 206) And whenever he is told, "Be conscious of God," his false pride drives him into sin: wherefore hell will be his allotted portion -and how vile a resting-place!
- (207) But there is [also] a kind of man who would willingly sell his own self in order to please God:¹⁹⁰ and God is most compassionate towards His servants.
- (208) O you who have attained to faith! Surrender yourselves wholly unto God,¹⁹¹ and follow not Satan's footsteps, for, verily, he is your open foe.
- (209) And if you should stumble after all evidence of the truth has come unto you, then know that, verily, God is almighty, wise.
- (210) Are these people¹⁹² waiting, perchance, for God to reveal Himself unto them in the shadows of the clouds, together with the angels-although [by then] all will have been decided, and unto God all things will have been brought back?¹⁹³
- (211) Ask the children of Israel how many a clear message We have given them! And if one alters God's blessed message¹⁹⁴ after it has reached him -verily, God is severe in retribution!
- (212) Unto those who are bent on denying the truth the life of this world [alone] seems goodly;¹⁹⁵ hence, they scoff at those who have attained to faith: but they who are conscious of God shall be above them on Resurrection Day. And God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.¹⁹⁶

174. The Mecca pilgrimage (hajj) takes place once a year, in the month of Dhu l-Hijjah, whereas a pious visit (umrah) may be performed at any time. In both hajj and 'umrah, the pilgrims are required to walk seven times around the Kabah and seven times between As-Safa and Al-Marwah (see notes 127 and 128 above); in the course of the hajj, they must, in addition, attend the gathering on the plain of 'Arafat on the 9th of Dhu 'l-Hijjah (see note 182 below). Irrespective of whether they are performing a full hajj or only an 'umrah, the pilgrims must refrain from cutting or even trimming the hair on their heads from the time they enter the state of pilgrimage (ihram) until the end of the pilgrimage, respectively the pious visit. As mentioned in the sequence, persons who are ill or suffer from an ailment which necessitates the cutting or shaving of one's hair are exempted from this prohibition.
175. Lit., "until the offering has reached its destination" -i.e., in time or in place; according to Razi, the time of sacrifice is meant here, namely, the conclusion of the pilgrimage, when those who participate in the hajj are expected -provided they can afford it -to sacrifice a sheep, a goat, or the like, and to distribute most of its flesh in charity.
176. The expression idha-amantum (lit., "when you are safe") refers here to safely both from external dangers (e.g., war) and from illness, and is, therefore, best rendered as "hale and secure" -the implication being that the person concerned is in a position, and intends, to participate in the pilgrimage.
177. This relates to an interruption, for the sake of personal comfort, of the state of pilgrimage (ihram) during the time intervening between the completion of an 'umrah and the performance of the hajj (cf. Manar II, 222). The pilgrim who takes advantage of this facility is obliged to sacrifice an animal (see note 175 above) at the termination of the pilgrimage or, alternatively, to fast for ten days.
178. Lit. "whose people are not present at the Inviolable House of Worship" - i.e., do not permanently reside there: for, obviously, the inhabitants of Mecca cannot remain permanently in the state of ihram.
179. This refers not merely to a possible violation of the sanctity of the pilgrimage but also, in a more general way, to all deliberate violations of God's ordinances.
180. Lit. "in the well-known months", Since the hajj culminates in one particular month (namely, Dhu'l-Hijjah), the plural apparently refers to its annual recurrence. It should, however, be noted that some commentators understand it as referring to the last three months of the lunar year.
181. I.e., by trading while in the state of ihram Muhammad 'Abduh points out (in Manar, 11, 231) that the endeavor "to obtain any bounty from your Sustainer" implies God-consciousness and, therefore, constitutes a kind of worship -provided, of course, that this endeavor does not conflict with any other, more prominent religious requirement.
182. The gathering of all pilgrims on the plain of 'Arafat, east of Mecca, takes place on the 9th of

Dhu 'I-Hijjah and constitutes the climax of the pilgrimage. The pilgrims are required to remain until sunset on that plain, below the hillock known as Jabal ar-Rahmah ("the Mount of Grace") symbolic act meant to bring to mind that ultimate gathering on Resurrection Day, when every soul will await God's judgment. Immediately after sunset, the multitudes of pilgrims move back in the direction of Mecca, stopping overnight at a place called Muzdalifah, the "holy place" referred to in the next clause of this sentence.

183. Lit. "and remember Him as He has guided you, although before that you had indeed been among those who go astray".
184. Lit., "surge onward in multitudes whence the people surge onward in multitudes": thus the pilgrims are called upon to submerge their individualities, at that supreme moment of the pilgrimage, in the consciousness or belonging to a community of people who are all equal before God, with no barrier of race or social status separating one person from another.
185. Most of the commentators see in this passage a reference to the custom of the pre-Islamic Arabs to extol, on the occasion of various gatherings, the greatness and the supposed virtues of their ancestors. Some of the earliest Islamic scholars, however -e.g., Ad-Dahhak, Ar-Rabi and Ab-Muslim -are of the opinion that what is meant here are actual fathers (or, by implication, 'both parents), whom a child usually considers to be the embodiment of all that is good and powerful (see Razi's commentary on this verse).
186. These are the days following the "Festival of Sacrifices" (id al-adha'), which takes place on the 10th of Dhu 'I-Hijjah. The pilgrims are obliged to spend at least two of these days in the valley of Mina, about half-way between' Arafat and Mecca.
187. Lit., "among the people there is he" (or "such as"). Since there is no valid reason to suppose, as some commentators do, that this refers to a particular person -a contemporary of Prophet -the most reliable authorities hold that the above passage has a general meaning (cf-Razi) As the context shows, it is a further elaboration of the allusion, made in 2: 200-201, to two contrasting attitudes: the attitude of people whose only real concern is the life of this world, and that of people who are mindful of the hereafter as well as, or even more than, their present life,
188. Lit., "the most contentious of adversaries in a dispute". According to Az-Zajjaj (quoted by Razi) this signifies a person who is always able to defeat his opponent in a controversy by the use of extremely adroit and often misleading arguments. It is obvious that this passage refers to people who hold plausible and even admirable views regarding a possible improvement of human society, and of man's lot on earth, but at the same time refuse to be guided by what they regard as "esoteric" considerations -like belief in a life after death -and justify their exclusive preoccupation with the affairs of this world by seemingly sound arguments and a stress on their own ethical objectives ("they cite God as witness to what is in their hearts"). There is an inescapable affinity between the mental attitude described in the above passage and the one spoken of in 2: 8-12.
189. Lit., "he hastens about the earth [or "strives on earth"] to spread corruption therein and to destroy tilth and progeny". Most of the commentators see in this sentence an indication of a conscious intent on the part of the person thus described; but it is also possible that the particle Li in li-yufsida (generally taken to mean "in

order that he might spread corruption”) plays in this context the role of what the grammarians call a lam al-’aqibah, “the (letter) Lam used to denote a consequence” -i.e., regardless of the existence or non-existence of conscious intent. (By rendering the sentence the way I do it, both possibilities are left open.) As regards the expression harth (rendered by me as “tilth”), its primary significance is “gain” or “acquisition” through labour: and thus it often signifies “worldly goods” (see Lane II, 542), and especially the crops obtained by tilling land, as well as the tilled land itself. If harth is understood in this context as “tilth”, it would apply, metaphorically, to human endeavors in general, and to social endeavors in particular. However, some commentators -basing their opinion on the Qur’anic sentence, “your wives are your tilth” (2:223) maintain that harth stands here for “wives” (cf. Razi, and the philologist Al-Azhart, as quoted in Manar II, 248): in which case the “destruction of tilth and progeny” would be synonymous with an upsetting of family life and, consequently, of the entire social fabric. According to either of these two interpretations, the passage has the following meaning: As soon as the mental attitude described above is generally accepted and made the basis of social behavior, it unavoidably results in widespread moral decay and, consequently, social disintegration.

190. Lit., “there is such as would sell his own self out of a desire for God’s pleasure”: i.e., would give up all his personal interests if compliance with God’s will were to demand it.
191. Lit., “enter wholly into self-surrender”. Since self-surrender to God is the basis of all true belief, some of the greatest commentators (e.g., Zamakhshari, Razi) hold that the address, “O you who have attained to faith” cannot refer here to Muslims -a designation which, throughout the Qur’an, literally means “those who have surrendered themselves to God” -but must relate to people who have not yet achieved such complete self-surrender: that is, to the Jews and the Christians, who do believe in most of the earlier revelations but do not regard the message of the Qur’an as true. This interpretation would seem to be borne out by the subsequent passages.
192. Lit. “they”-obviously recurring to the people addressed in the preceding two verses.
193. I.e., it will be too late for repentance. All commentators agree in that the “decision” relates to the unequivocal manifestation of God’s will on the Day of Judgment, which is alluded to in the words, “when Unto God all things will have been brought back”. Since, in the next verse, the children of Israel are addressed, it is possible that this rhetorical question is connected with their refusal, in the time of Moses, to believe in the divine message unless they “see God face to face” (cf. 2.55)
194. Lit. “God’s blessing”,
195. Lit., “has been made beautiful”,
196. I.e. He cannot be called to account for the way in which He distributes worldly benefits, sometimes granting them to the morally deserving and sometimes to sinners.

